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READ ALOUD TUTORING: A PROGRAM TO ENHANCE READING INTERESTS

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Meaningful reading, to a large extent, depends upon the interaction between the reader and the material read. In order to comprehend what is read and interact with the writer, the reader must bring prior knowledge to bear on the passage (Otto and Smith, 1980; Rumelhart, 1976; Smith, 1978).

An important goal of reading instruction is to bring students and books together through a variety of mediums. Ultimately, the goal is to have students use reading skills to learn and select reading as a recreational activity on a lifelong basis. Shanahan (1982) postulated that to direct children's curiosity toward books, and to demonstrate the importance of reading, classroom teachers must share their love of books in various ways. Reading aloud to children is one medium of sharing one's zeal and enthusiasm for books, as well as motivating children to want to read for pleasure. Many authorities (Neal and Anderson, 1979; Petty, Petty, and Becking, 1973; Reed, 1972; Tanyzer, 1972) have suggested that teacher must incorporate more literature into the reading program as a basic component of the overall instructional program.

A current trend which has fostered both cognitive and attitudinal gains for students involved is the use of tutorial programs in which tutoring in reading is conducted either by peers or para-professionals. Cohen and Kulik (1981) report on several experimental studies which indicate significant gains for tutors and tutees.

A Volunteer Tutorial Program

In early fall, a local elementary school principal called together a group of persons interested and committed to the improvement of performance in reading. She had conceived the idea of a read-aloud tutorial program. Among those invited were retired reading and basic skills specialists, a reading consultant from a nearby college, central office reading personnel, representatives from an adjacent high school, and parent volunteers. The purpose of the meeting was to design a volunteer reading program to enhance children's attitudes toward reading.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a volunteer tutorial program had been designed to involve seventy-five Advanced Placement and Honors students from the high school and parent volunteers to read-aloud to and/or listen to third and fourth grade children read aloud for approximately forty-five minutes per day during the spring semester. The program was coordinated by the school Language Arts Specialist who paired tutors and tutees to work

together. If problems developed (as in one situation) in initial pairing of volunteer and student, the Language Arts Specialist observed the situation and exchanged either the tutor or the tutee to make a more compatible match.

Volunteers, coordinated by a retired reading specialist, met regularly during the fall semester preparing for the program. A three hour training workshop for volunteer tutors was held at the beginning of the semester. The workshop included an overview of the program, an explanation of the duties and responsibilities of the tutors, and demonstrations of how to read a book to a child and select books for several different purposes.

Third and fourth grade teachers used the available California Achievement Test (CAT) scores as criteria for selection of students to participate in the program. Seventy-five third and fourth grade students to participate in the program. Seventy-five third and fourth grade students performing at least six months below grade placement on the CAT were selected by the classroom teachers to participate.

Materials

Several sets of high interest books were donated by publishing companies and volunteers. Volunteer reading specialists determined the reading ability level, categorized, and annotated a wide variety of books for the program. A Record of Free Reading Form was provided for the tutees to record all books read with or by a tutor. All tutors received an annotated copy of all available materials which included readability level and approximate grade and interest levels.

Evaluation

Although no formal assessment was made, opportunities for constant dialogue were provided throughout the semester. In addition, a "suggestion box" was available for those who wanted to make anonymous suggestions.

At mid-semester, the tutors and tutees were asked to express their feelings orally about the program, during a school-provided breakfast meeting. The elementary students made such statements as "I don't want to miss school because I'll miss my tutor"; "I read more now since my tutor started reading to me," and "My tutor does some fun things with me." The student tutors likewise stated, "I have discovered things about myself that I was not aware of," "I have developed more patience than I had before," "I have established a buddy relationship and would like to continue it," "I read more now since I am preparing to read to someone."

As the semester ended, both tutors and tutees were saddened. Teachers and tutors reported evidence of more positive attitudes and higher interests in achievement in academic subjects as well as many more children migrating, unaided, to the Library Center. In addition, tutors reported many different and unanticipated successes as a result of the program.

Conclusion

Cohen and Kulik (1981) conducted a meta-analysis of 65 major

studies of student tutorial programs. They concluded that tutorial programs contribute to the academic growth of the children who are tutored and definitely benefit both tutors and tutees on both cognitive and attitudinal levels.

While no formal data were collected for the program described, basically because of the numerous compounding variables impacting on the lives of the tutees; the positive feedback, the smiles and obvious attitudinal changes provided an enormous amount of reinforcement for all persons involved.

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